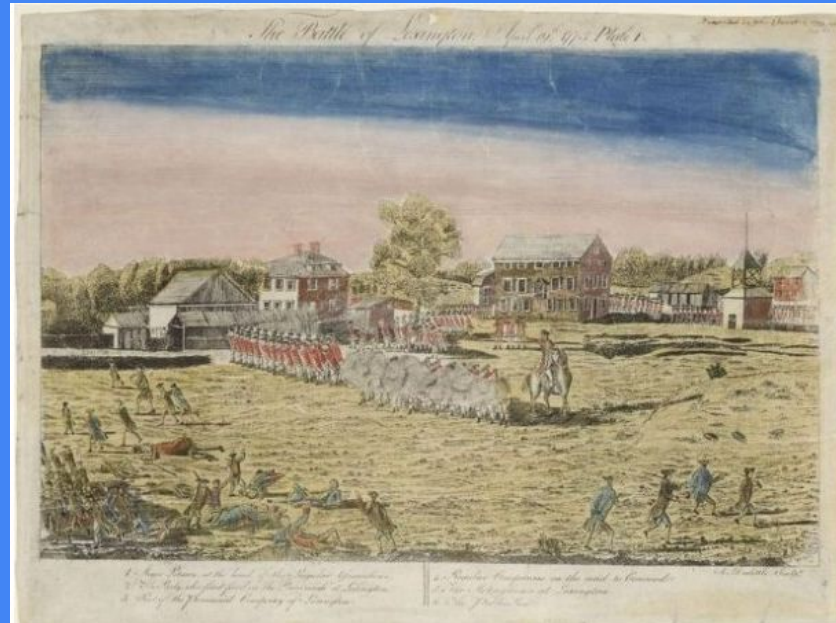


“The Improvement of the Militia in  
General in the Art Military Has Been  
Therefore Thought Necessary”

*A Review of the Militia Laws and Regulations on the Eve of  
Lexington and Concord*

# Introduction



## *What We Will Cover Today...*

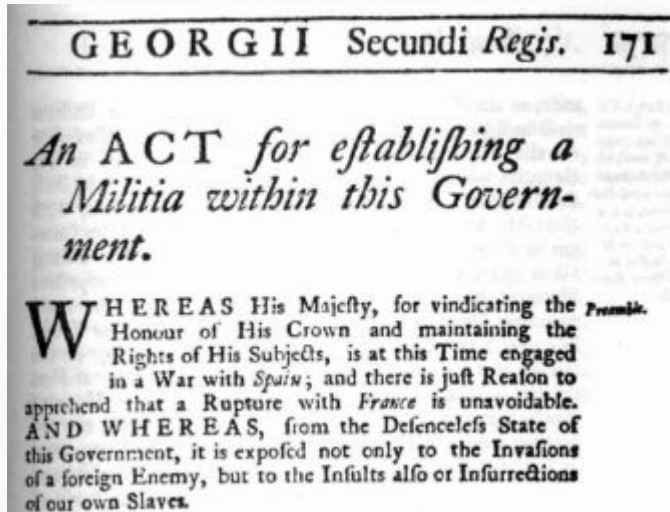
- What are militia laws?
- What did Pre-Lexington and Concord militia laws require in regard to equipment?
- Massachusetts Provincial Congress' Regulations
- Town's Response to the Provincial Congress
- Men in Action: Examples of Massachusetts men who armed and supplied their militia and minute companies.
- The Results: What did militia and minute companies carry on April 19th?

“This is a super-important quote”



- From an expert

# Massachusetts Militia Laws



- Massachusetts Militia Laws were 17th and 18th century legal statutes that were drafted and passed by the legislature of Massachusetts Bay Colony.

# Massachusetts Militia Laws

- The laws included a description of:
  - Who was expected to serve in the militia
  - What occasions when a militia should mobilize in response to an emergency situation
  - How they should be equipped for a military campaign.
- Failure to follow the law would result in ***criminal penalties!!***
- Specifically, if a militiaman was found to have violated a provision of a militia law, he would have been required to pay a hefty fine OR possibly subject to physical punishment.

# Massachusetts Militia Laws

Commission  
Officers  
Power.

IX. THAT the Commission Officers of any Company or Troop, or the major Part of them, may order the Correcting and Punishing Disorders and Contempt on a Training Day, or on a Watch, the Punishment not being greater than laying Neck and Heels, Riding the **Wood**en Horse, or Ten Shillings Fine.

# Massachusetts Militia Laws

- Massachusetts militia laws went into great detail describing what arms and equipment a militia man was required to carry during an alarm.
- A firelock
- Edged weapon
- Ammunition
- Pack
- Blanket and canteen.



# Massachusetts Militia Laws

“ Every listed souldier ... shall be alwayes provided with a well fixt firelock musket, of musket or bastard musket bore, the barrel not less then three foot and a half long, or other good firearms to the satisfaction of the commission officers of the company, a snapsack, a coller with twelve bandealers or cartouch-box, one pound of good powder, twenty bullets fit for his gun, and twelve flints, a good sword or cutlace, a worm and priming wire fit for his gun.” *Massachusetts Militia Laws, Nov. 22, 1693.*

# Massachusetts Militia Laws

“Every listed Soldier, and other Householder shall be always provided with a well fixt Firelock Musket, of Musket or Bastard-Musket bore, the Barrel not less than three Foot and an half long, or other good Fire Arms to the satisfaction of the Commission Officers of the Company; a Cartouch Box: one Pound of good Powder: Twenty Bullets fit for his Gun, and twelve Flynts; a good Sword or Cutlass; a Worm, & priming Wire, fit for his Gun...” *Boston Newsletter, February 7, 1733.*

# The Massachusetts Provincial Congress

## *In Provincial Congress,*

*Cambridge, October 26, 1774.*

*Whereas in Consequence of the present unhappy Disputes between Great-Britain and the Colonies, a formidable Body of Troops with warlike Preparations of every Sort are already arrived at, and others destined for the Metropolis of this Province, and the expressed Design of their being sent is to execute Acts of the British Parliament, utterly subversive of the Constitution of the Province. And whereas his Excellency General Gage has attempted by his Troops to disperse the Inhabitants of Salem, whilst assembled to consult Measures for preserving their Freedom; and to subjugate the Province to arbitrary Government;—And proceeding to fill more unjustifiable and alarming Lengths has Fortified against the Country the Capital of the Province, and thus greatly endangered the Lives, Liberties and Properties of its oppressed Citizens;—invaded private Property by unlawfully seizing and retaining large Quantities of Ammunition in the Arsenal at Boston and sundry Pieces of Ordnance and Warlike Stores of all Sort, provided at the Public Expense for the Use of the Province, and by all possible Means endeavoured to place the Province entirely in a defenceless State—at the same Time having neglected and altogether disregarded Assurances from this Congress, of the pacific Dispositions of the Inhabitants of the Province, and Intreaties that he would cease from Measures which tended to prevent a Restoration of Harmony between Great-Britain and the Colonies:*

- As tensions mounted during the fall of 1774, the Provincial Congress began to pass Resolutions that, if followed, would better prepare the militia for a potential conflict with England.
- These resolves were not laws and did not alter the old militia act. Rather, they were recommendations that worked within the existing militia framework.

“The improvement of the militia in general in the art military has been therefore thought necessary, and **strongly recommended** by this Congress. We now think that particular care should be taken by the towns and districts in this colony, that each of the minute men, not already provided therewith, should be immediately equipped with an effective firearm, bayonet, pouch, knapsack, thirty rounds of cartridges and balls.”

*~Massachusetts Provincial Congress, “To the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Towns and Districts of Massachusetts-Bay,” Cambridge, December 10, 1774.~*

## *Why “Recommend” as Opposed to “Order”?*

- It is likely that the Massachusetts Provincial Congress chose the phrase “recommend” instead of “order” so as to not appear in open rebellion against either Massachusetts Bay Colony or the British Crown.
- As a result, most Massachusetts towns elected to pass resolutions executing Congress’ “recommendations” and ordering what its respective minute and militia companies would be armed and equipped with.
- Many towns actually expanded upon the Provincial Congress recommendations.

The 1774-1775  
Militia and Minute  
Company  
Resolutions of  
Massachusetts  
Towns



# 3 Types of Town Militia Resolutions

- Vague, often last minute, resolutions passed by towns after January, 1775 that likely relied upon existing militia laws.
- Highly detailed resolutions that often expanded upon or added to the recommendations of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress as to what a militiaman or minuteman should carry.
  - Many towns also passed Resolutions that agreed to provide specific equipment items to militia and minutemen at a cost to the town.
- Resolutions and contractual clauses drafted and issued by “independent” minute companies from several Massachusetts towns.



# Vaguely Worded Resolutions

- The Town of Amesbury voted that its minutemen would be responsible for their own arms and equipment. “Voted that said Minnit men shall upon their own cost be well equiped with arms and aminition according to law fit for a march.” *Resolution of the Town of Amesbury, March 20, 1775.*
- Boxford merely issued a resolution that its minutemen “arm, equip, and hold themselves in readiness to march in any emergency in defence of the Province.” *Resolution of the Town of Boxford, January 5, 1775.*
- “Voted that the Alarm list should be equipt with fire arms and ammunion, and to raise fifty minute- men, including officers: that they be disciplined one half day in a week for eight weeks ensuing, and that they be paid eight pence per each half day they are disciplined over and more than the militia are disciplined.” *Resolution of the Town of Chelmsford, March 6, 1775.*

# Detailed Resolutions that Expanded Upon the Provincial Congress Orders

- "Militia minutemen [to] hold themselves in readiness at a minutes warning, compleat in arms and ammunition; that is to say a good and sufficient firelock, bayonet, thirty rounds of powder and ball, pouch and knapsack." *Resolution of the Town of Roxbury, December 26, 1774*
- Braintree required each soldier furnish himself with "a good fire lock, bayonett, cartouch box, one pound of powder, twenty-four balls to fitt their guns, twelve flints and a knapsack." *Resolution of the Town of Braintree, January 23, 1775.*

- "Each soldier to provide himself with a good firearm, a steel or iron ramrod and a spring for same, a worm, a priming wire and brush, a bayonet fitted to his gun, a scabbard and belt thereof, a cutting sword fifteen rounds . . . at least, a hundred buckshot, six flints, one pound of powder, forty leaden balls fitted to the gun, a knapsack and blanket, [and] a canteen or wooden bottle to hold one quart [of water]." *Journal of Arthur Harris of the Bridgewater Coy of Militia.*

- “To the inhabitants of the Town of Brimfield in the County of Hampshire . . . recommended that the minute men be provided with Cartridge Boxes, Knapsacks, Thirty Rounds of Cartridges and Ball and Bayaonets . . .” *Resolution of the Town of Brimfield, January 18, 1775.*

# “Independent” Companies

- “We the subscribers, soldiers inlisted from the several Militia companies within this town, and organized into a company called the Minute Company, do solemnly covenant that we will as soon as possible be provided and equipt with an effective firearm, cartouch box (or bullet pouch), 30 rounds of powder and bullets, and knapsack. That we will exert our best abilities to acquire the art military. That we will yield a ready obedience to the commands of our officers, and hold ourselves in readiness to march upon the earliest notice from our Commanding officers, and hazard our lives in resisting any armed force that shall attempt by force to put in execution the late revenue Acts — should any attempt be made between this time and the first of July next.” *Covenant of the West Brookfield Minute Company, January 8, 1775.*

- “We whose names are hereunto subscribed, do voluntarily Inlist ourselves, as minute men, to be ready for military operation, upon the shortest notice. And we hereby Promise & engage, that we will immediately, each of us, provide for & equip himself, with an effective arm, Bayonet, Pouch, Knapsack, & Thirty rounds of Cartridges ready made. And that we may obtain the skill of compleat Soldiers, We promise to Convene for exercise in the Art of Military, at least twice every week.” *Minuteman Covenant for the Town of Ipswich, January 14, 1775.*

- On the eve of the American Revolution, Captain James Brickett's Company from Haverhill voted "that we Dress in a Uniform consisting of a Blue Coat, turned up with Buff, and yellow plain Buttons, the Coat cut half way the thigh; and the Pockets a Slope. Voted, Also, that we have Buff, or Nankeen Waistcoat & Breeches, and White Stockings with half Boots or Gaiters. Also that the Hats be cocked alike. And that each one have a bright gun, Bayonet, & Steel Ramrod. Voted that the Company be equipd in this Uniform by the first Monday in May." *Minutes of Captain James Brickett's Company, March 21, 1775.*





# Uniformity

- Many towns passed resolutions agreeing to provide some or all of the accouterments of its minute and militia companies.
- Local men were hired by their respective towns to make certain pieces of equipment for the militia and minute companies. For example, one resident may have made cartridge boxes for his town's minute company while another made bayonet carriages.
- As a result, there was some semblance of uniformity amongst American minute companies on the eve of Lexington and Concord in regard to accouterments carried.

- “Voted as follows that the sum of fifty two pounds four shillings be and is hereby granted to provide for those person who have inlisted as minute men each on a bayonet belt catrige box steal ramer, gun stock and knap sack.” *Resolution of the Town of Lincoln, March 20, 1775.*

- “Voted, that the prayer of the petition be so far granted that the Town of Brimfield provide for 50 minute men a Cartridge Box, Knapsack, and thirty rounds of cartridge and ball a sett for each private in said Company to be provided imemdiately.” *Resolution of the Town of Brimfield, January 18, 1775.*

- Methuen resolved to provide bayonets “which should be brought to Capt. John Davis and after the service was over said Davis is to return said bayonets unto the Selectmen of said town.” Resolution of the Town of Methuen, January 1775.
- “Voted, That the Selectmen provide bayonets and cartouch boxes for the Minute-Men on the town cost, to be returned to the town after they are dismissed from the service.” *Resolution of the Town of Bradford, January 20, 1775.*

- “Voted, that the enlisted soldiers be furnished with bayonets at the expense of the town. Voted, that a committee be chosen to collect the bayonets now in the hands of individuals in this Town and provide such a number of new ones as will be sufficient to supply the minute men. Voted, that the Committee chosen at the last meeting to procure bayonets collect as many as they can of those belonging to the Province by next Wednesday, two o'clock, P. M., that they procure one hundred more to be made as soon as possible and supply those firelocks that are effective which belong to the minute men with good bayonets as soon as may be.”  
*Resolution of the Town of Andover, February, 1775.*

- “Upon request of a number of the Inhabitants to see if the Town will call for those bayonets that were providede for part of the training soldiers at the Province cost, and that the remaindere of the soldiers may be providede with bayonets at the expense of the Towne, to be returnable when called for. And that those persons that have purchased bayonets at their own cost may be paid for them, by the Towne, at the price the others cost the Towne.”
- The residents also resolved “that bayonets be provided at the Towns cost for one thirde part of the training soldiers in this Town, including those soldiers that have already had bayonets provided for them at the Province charge.” *Declarations and Resolves, Town of Lexington, December 12 and 28, 1774.*

# Examples of Equipment Provided



“To Ariel Collins, for 43 cartouch-boxes, £1. Is. 6d. ; to Thomas Bates, for a gun and bayonet, £2. 10s. ; to Luke Bliss, for a gun and bayonet, £2. 8s. ; to Capt. Thomas Stebbins, for the use of a gun, 6s.; to Timothy Bliss, for a large homespun blanket, 15s.; to John Burt, for a blanket, 9s.; to Oliver Burt, for a gun delivered Sylvanus Hale, £2 . . . to George Cotton, Jr., for a blanket and knapsack delivered Benoni Barrister, 13s. 6d.” *Resolution of the Town of Springfield, November 14, 1775.*



- “Voted 16 shillings to Jonas Varnum for 3 bayonets for his family as Minute-men.” *Resolution of the Town of Dracut, April 2, 1777.*
- “[January] 14 [1775] I made me a Cartridge-box, I Covered it with a Coltskin it will Carry 19 Rounds.” *Israel Litchfield Journal, January 14, 1775.*
- “Voted, To Phineas Carlton, for 22 Bayonets fitted with Scabbards and Belts, 8l. 5s. 0d. Voted, To Phineas Carlton, for Scowering the old Bayonets, and fitting with Belts, 4l. 4s. 0d. For 2 Scabbards and Belts, 0l. 3s. 0d. Wm. Greenough, for fitting one Bayonet and one belt, 0l. 2s. 8d.” *Resolution of the Town of Bradford, September 21, 1775.*

# Lexington

- **Jonathan Harrington Sr.** - father of company fifer Jonathan Harrington, was charged with making cartridge boxes and belting for the militia.
- **Phillip Russell**- was also making cartridge boxes and bayonets for members of the militia.
- **Nathan Simonds** - was providing blankets to those Lexington militiamen who could not afford them.
- **John Parker** - Was possibly making powder horns for the Lexington Company

# Sample of Accounts Regarding Arms and Equipment Carried by the Men of Captain John Parker's Company

- “An Inventory of the Real and Personal Estate of Capt. John Parker Late of Lexington taken June 1776, Middlesex County Probate Court . . . One gun ...powder ball & flints...three Powder horns...A knapsack”. *Inventory of Captain John Parker's Estate, June, 1776.*
- On April 11, 1788, a petition was made to the Middlesex Court to appoint John Bridge as executor of Jonas Parker's estate. His son Jonas Jr. was made executor but had died prior to settling the estate. A partial list of items on the inventory of the estate are as follows “Wooden bottle . . . a beaver hat . . . a wig . . . blue/grey stockings.” *Inventory of Jonas Parker's Estate, June 1777.*

As the British column crossed into Lexington, Lieutenant Sutherland physically collided with Benjamin Wellington, a thirty-one-year-old Lexington resident who had his musket and bayonet in hand. “I . . . mett one of them in the teeth whom I obliged to give up his firelock and bayonet, which I believe he would not have done so easily but for Mr. Adair’s coming up.”  
*Lieutenant William Sutherland to General Thomas Gage, April 27, 1775.*

“In the obedience to your Excellency's commands, I marched on the evening of the 18th inst. with the corps of grenadiers and light infantry for Concord, to execute your Excellency's orders with respect to destroying all ammunition, artillery, tents, &c, collected there. I think it proper to observe, that when I had got some miles on the march from Boston, I detached six light infantry companies to march with all expedition to seize the two bridges on different roads beyond Concord. On these companies' arrival at Lexington, I understand, from the report of Major Pitcairn, who was with them, and from many officers, that they found on a green close to the road **a body of the country people drawn up in military order, with arms and accoutrement**, and, as appeared after, loaded.” *Lieutenant Colonel Smith's to General Gage, April 22, 1775.*

Questions?



# Thanks!

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*John Collins Photography*